the Trans-Siberian Railroad, and the most coveted place was Irkutsk, the capital of eastern Siberia.

JILKINO

I was assigned for settlement to the village of Jilkino, located on the high shore of the Angara River, across from Irkutsk. Two rows of solidly built log houses flanked a broad and straight road. They had high fences with strong gates that were always closed. Every window had voile curtains and flowerpots. On one side of the road, snow-covered fields stretched behind the row of houses to the horizon; on the other flowed the river, as blue as the cloudless sky, between snow-covered shores.

After a long search I found a room with board (for twelve rubles—six dollars—a month) in a peasant house. My landlady, Stepanida, warned me not to trust malicious rumors about the village. "Those who say that we sow and reap not in the fields but on vodka barrels are liars," she said. "To listen to them, all the thieves of Irkutsk hide here. Nonsense! There are other dens than ours around here!"

I took her word for this and thus preserved my memory of Jilkino in all its fairy-tale sweetness. The Angara, in its winter attire, was as striking as when I had seen it from the ferry on the way from Irkutsk to Alexandrovsk. In the morning it was hidden under a dense cloud. The air was perfectly clear on the shore, but a white curtain hung over the river. As the sun rose, the curtain began to thin. First the forested hills on the far shore emerged on the horizon, then the river appeared in its snow bed, a blue ribbon on glittering silver brocade. A couple of miles upstream the dark wall of the forest behind the river was broken by a cluster of white and red buildings and the palace of the Governor General, an imposing structure with lofty columns and three rows of glittering windows.

At the other end of the village was the monastery of St. Innokenty, one of the most revered shrines in Siberia, with a large but somewhat incongruous dome surrounded by two score whitewashed houses—dormitories of monks, workshops, barns, storehouses, and a large guesthouse, all encircled by a beautiful old park. Each morning pilgrims thronged to the monastery for prayer and miraculous cure, but the influx of visitors was particularly large on Saturday evening, after the night service in the church. Then sledges with amorous couples from Irkutsk stopped in front of the monastery guesthouse, where liquors were sold at any hour. An old monk waited at its door. He looked tired and bored and when I asked him about his work, he sighed.